

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Thornhill Road Conservation Area

INTRODUCTION

This document is an “appraisal “ document as defined by English Heritage in their guidance document “Conservation Area Appraisals”.

The purpose of the document is, to quote from the English Heritage document, to ensure that “the special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance”. This provides a “sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions” and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

This appraisal describes and analyses the particular character of the Thornhill Road Conservation Area which was designated by the Council in 1988. This includes the more obvious aspects such as buildings, spaces and architectural development, as well as an attempt to portray the often less tangible qualities which make the area “special”.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- (i) National Policies – Individual buildings “of special architectural or historic interest” have enjoyed a means of statutory protection since the 1950’s, but the concept of protecting areas of special merit, rather than individual buildings, was first brought under legislative control with the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. A crucial difference between the two is that Listed buildings are assessed against national criteria, with Lists being drawn up by English Heritage. Conservation Areas by contrast are designated by Local Authorities on more local criteria, and are therefore very varied in character. However, general guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), which sets out the government’s policies on the historic built environment in general. By 2005 there were eleven designated Conservation Areas in Waltham Forest.
- (ii) Local Policies – Legislation and guidance has emphasised the importance of including firm Conservation Area policies within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which must in turn be based on a clear definition of what constitutes that “special architectural or historic

interest” which warranted designation in the first place. Policy BHE13 in the “Built and historic environment” chapter of the adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006 is the relevant council policy concerning the designation and subsequent control of Conservation Areas within the borough.

In addition Policy 4B.7 of The London Plan produced by the Greater London Authority emphasises the need for boroughs to work with local communities to recognise and manage local distinctiveness, ensuring proposed developments preserve or enhance local social, physical, cultural, historical, environmental and economic characteristics.

DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST

(i) Location and population:

Thornhill Road Conservation Area is situated in Leyton, which since 1965 has been within the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The area lies to the south of the old parish church of St Mary’s, and about a hundred yards west of the High Road, separated from it by the 1950’s “Thornhill Gardens” estate of flats.

The Lea Valley with its former marshes lies a short distance to the west beyond Oliver Road, and the area lies on the generally flat land just beyond the former flood plain.

The Conservation Area contains 46 properties and the estimated population is approximately 200 people.

(ii) Origins and development of settlement:

To the Saxons Leyton was Lugetune, and in the Domesday Book it is Leituna, “a farmstead on the Lea”. Whilst there is sporadic evidence of Roman settlement it was the Saxons who made the real beginnings of modern Leyton, and it is probable that their original settlement lay between the High Road, Grange Park Road, and Church Road.

The Domesday book records that there were two priests in Leyton in 1086, one in each of two of the three Manors. It was common practice for the Lord of the Manor to build a church, which naturally necessitated a priest, and it is likely that the parish church of St Mary’s originated in this way on what became the Manor of Leyton Grange.

Until the middle of the 19th century Leyton, or Low Leyton as it was known, was a country parish in south-west Essex. Bounded on the west by the Lea and its marshes, and on the east by the remnants of the forest of Waltham (now Epping Forest), it was an attractive rural location for wealthy and influential Londoners to choose for their country houses or retirement.

This rural character was to change dramatically after the construction of the Loughton branch steam railway line in 1856, which precipitated the break-up of the old manors and estates. Rapidly the fields, parks and gardens gave way to streets of Victorian housing, and by the turn of the century Leyton was much as we know it today.

Thornhill Road itself was laid out on an area of open land which was formerly a field belonging to the Manor of Leyton Grange. The Manor House itself, erected in 1720 by David Gansel, stood on the north side of Church Road astride what is now Grange Park Road. It was sold in 1860 to the British Land Company, who demolished it the following year and began to develop the estate for housing.

The first sale of building plots in Thornhill and Oliver Roads took place on December 2nd 1861. The estate was laid out in 66 separate lots, only 19 of which had been sold by the time of the second sale on January 20th 1862. One of the stipulations attached to the sale of Lots was that “no dwellinghouse, or portion of any dwellinghouse, of less value than £150, is to be erected on any Lot”. Plots on Oliver Road backing onto Thornhill Road were laid out at the same time, so the buildings erected are of a similar date. Development continued in a piecemeal fashion by speculative builders who built 1-6 houses at a time, using the standard building materials of the time; yellow London stock bricks and grey Welsh slates. The first Ordnance Survey plan of the area (1865) shows only a few plots developed, but all the housing in Thornhill Road was eventually completed by 1895.

Whilst the street layout is entirely conventional the fact that development was carried out piecemeal by a number of builders means that very few buildings are alike, and they range from small cottages to large villas.

During the last World War the eastern end of the road was badly damaged by enemy bombing, and a number of original properties were destroyed. The Thornhill Gardens flats were subsequently erected on the site in 1955 as part of Leyton’s post-war rebuilding programme. As part of the redevelopment the original road junction with the High Road was blocked off, removing through traffic and making Thornhill Road a quiet backwater, which it remains to this day.

(iii) The prevailing or former uses within the area and their historic patronage, and the influence of these on the plan form and building types:

Before being developed for housing in the late 19th century the site was an open field, probably farmed as part of the Leyton Grange estate. Neither this former use nor historic patronage had any influence on the layout of the road or the building types that followed.

(iv) The archaeological significance and potential of the area including identification of any scheduled ancient monuments:

The site contains no scheduled ancient monuments and is outside the archaeological priority zone identified in the Council’s Unitary Development Plan. The Leyton area has however yielded archaeological finds over the years. Palaeolithic implements and fossil bones found along the gravel terraces show that early man lived and hunted in Leyton. Roman remains have also been found, most recently in 2005 on the

Beaumont Road estate to the north. There was a Roman cemetery south of Blind Lane, and massive foundations of some Roman building, with quantities of Roman brick, were discovered in the grounds of Leyton Grange during the 19th century so further finds cannot be discounted.

(v) The architectural and historic qualities of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the Conservation Area:

All buildings within the Conservation Area date from the second half of the 19th century and are essentially typical products of the period, using a limited range of materials: yellow London stock bricks, natural Welsh slates, clay chimney pots, painted timber box sash and casement windows, and painted timber doors. The special interest of the area derives from the diversity of Victorian building types in evidence, itself a product of the piecemeal way in which the street was developed. Cottages, houses and villas, semi detached or in terraces are all combined in one short street as a cross section of late Victorian speculative development.

(vi) The contribution made by key unlisted buildings:

There are no Listed or Locally Listed buildings within the Conservation Area, but the most original or least altered properties clearly have the greatest intrinsic value, and make the greatest contribution to the special interest of the area. They are also valuable as they also provide a reliable reference for original features and detailing which can be referred to when restoring similar properties in Thornhill Road.

(vii) The character and relationship of spaces within the area:

Thornhill Road is essentially a short, straight street of houses with tarmac footpaths on either side, into which a variety of medium-sized ornamental trees have been planted. The houses themselves are set back from the back edge of the footpaths, with a standard depth building line of approximately 3.0 metres. The only exceptions to this within the Conservation Area are 25 & 27 Rosedene Terrace, which abut directly onto the back edge of the footpath.

On the south side of Thornhill Rd and on the north side, west of Rosedene Terrace, the properties form a largely continuous built frontage, with just the occasional narrow gaps providing gated access to the rear gardens. Notably different are 35-41 Thornhill Road and the adjoining 25 & 27 Rosedene Terrace, which are distinctively designed pairs of semi-detached cottages. Their more spacious, lower density layout has resulted in greater distances between the buildings and more spacious gardens fronting the street. This contrasts with the smaller, standard depth gardens found in the rest of the area.

Nearly all front gardens are enclosed behind a variety of different front boundary treatments, mainly brick walls or timber fences, with the occasional use of metalwork. The piecemeal way the street was developed means that there was no uniform original boundary treatment, although surviving examples suggest that a low brick wall of London Stocks with stone coping (approx 750mm high) was fairly typical, probably topped by decorative cast-iron railings.

(viii) Prevalent and traditional building materials, textures and colours:

The traditional materials used in the construction of the Thornhill Road properties were yellow London stock bricks, flush-pointed with Lime mortar, and grey Welsh slates with Lead flashings. Red brick can also be found on a number of the properties, used as decorative string courses, dressings, brick arches etc. Many properties feature artificial stone for lintols, keystones, window cills, bay windows, architraves and cornices etc. Almost invariably these are paint finished, usually in a white or off-white. Traditionally however they would almost certainly have been painted in more muted tones to resemble natural stone.

Cast-iron gutters and downpipes, and clay chimney pots on top of brick stacks were standard original features. The majority of pots still survive, mainly in yellow clay, and in variations of the common “cannon-head” style. Whilst a few terracotta pots exist it seems probable that they are slightly later replacements.

Painted timber doors and windows are standard original features for all properties within the area and many examples still survive. With the exception of 25/27 Rosedene Terrace and 35-41 Thornhill Road which had timber casement windows, all other properties were constructed with timber double-hung single-glazed box sash windows.

(ix) Local details:

The piecemeal way in which the road was developed is reflected in the mix of detached, semi-detached, and terraced properties within its short length. Most properties reflect the prevalent design conventions of the time, but there are nevertheless a few details of note that have especial local interest. Nos 35 and 37 Thornhill Road have particularly interesting examples of carved decorative bargeboards, brackets, and finials, which contrast with the plainer examples found on the otherwise identical pair of cottages at Nos 39 and 41.

On the flank wall of No 20 Thornhill Road can still be seen a carved stone tablet announcing that that this modest semi detached property is Inkerman Cottage. It thus takes its name from the Battle of Inkerman in the Crimean War, which was fought in November 1854.

No 27 Rosedene Terrace is the only property in the area to feature square clay chimney pots on top of its highly decorative chimney stacks. The matching items that must have originally featured on No 25 have long since been removed, making these original items all the more valuable.

(x) The contribution made by green spaces, hedges and other natural or cultivated elements to the character of the area:

Within the footpath either side of Thornhill Road are decorative street trees planted by the Council. Mainly decorative *Crataegus* cultivars, these trees are a valuable amenity item both for their attractive foliage and blossom, and for the wildlife that they attract to the area.

Behind the front garden walls many properties still retain their original privet hedging, or some more recent shrub planting, which provides a degree of privacy and enclosure in the Victorian tradition. Along with the street trees this green barrier adds an attractive sylvan quality to an otherwise hard urban streetscape. More recently however this quality has been eroded as hedging has been removed and some gardens paved over, often with inappropriate materials.

(xi) The setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the landscape or open countryside, including definition of significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas, where appropriate:

When originally laid out Thornhill Road ran from Oliver Road through to Leyton High Road. Views to the east were terminated by yet more terraces of Victorian developments on the east side of the High Road, whilst to the west it remained first open land, then under greenhouses until well into the 20th century. Sadly none of this contemporary development survives today. At the eastern end, erected after enemy bombing in the last war, stands the Thornhill Gardens flats, an uninspiring Council development which respects neither the layout, scale, or architectural vocabulary of the Thornhill Road properties. Visually and physically it is a clumsy termination to eastern views down the street. To the west a modern development of housing on the west side of Church Road now closes off any longer views of the Lea valley, reinforcing the urban context of the street.

(xii) The extent of loss, intrusion or damage. ie the negative factors:

The Conservation Area has suffered greatly from misinformed and unsympathetic alterations to buildings since its designation in 1988. Whilst it is now belatedly protected by an Article 4(2) Direction, considerable harm has already been done to its special character and appearance by these alterations.

Two of the most harmful changes have been to original roofs and windows. Out of just 46 properties in the area, nearly 75% have had the original natural slate roofs replaced, mainly with coloured-concrete tiles, and 75% have had inappropriate replacement windows installed, usually made from upvc.

Originally built of facing brickwork, just under 50% of properties within the area have also been pebble-dashed and/or painted over the years, to the further detriment of the special character and appearance of the area.

The loss of decorative ironwork during the scrap metal drives of World War II undeniably had a negative impact on the original appearance of the streetscene. More recently the gradual loss of front boundary walls and hedging, and the paving over of front gardens is further eroding this original character & appearance.

Unless there is a firm commitment and concerted effort from residents to reinstate as near as possible the original appearance of properties within the area, it is debateable whether it will still merit its Conservation Area status when the issue is next reviewed.

Apart from the street trees in the footpaths the public streetscape has no features of special interest, being largely typical of most streets in the surrounding area. The original paving flags were removed many years ago and replaced with tarmac, although the granite kerbing does survive. No original or early lamp columns survive however, having been replaced with nondescript steel columns of a standard pattern.

(xiii) The existence of any neutral areas:

Thornhill Road is a small compact street of Victorian houses and there are not considered to be any “neutral” areas within the designated boundary.

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MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Thornhill Road Conservation Area

(i) Legislative background

The designation of a Conservation Area and production of an Appraisal document is not an end in itself. The Appraisal provides the basis for developing management proposals for the Conservation Area that fulfil the general duty placed on the local authority under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, now formalised in BV 219c, to draw up and publish such proposals. The purpose of this document is to present draft proposals which seek to achieve the preservation and enhancement of the special character of the Conservation Area, informed by the Appraisal, for consultation. The special qualities of the Conservation Area have been identified as part of the appraisal process in the first part of this document, and both will be subject to monitoring and review. This guidance draws on the themes identified in the Appraisal, and satisfies the statutory requirement of section 71(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, namely:

“It shall be the duty of the local planning authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas”.

This document reflects Government guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance 15 “Planning and the Historic Environment”, English Heritage guidance set out in “Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas”, and policies contained within the Waltham Forest Unitary Development Plan 2006.

(ii) Statutory controls

Designation as a Conservation Area brings with it a degree of additional statutory protection under planning legislation aimed at assisting the “preservation or enhancement” of the area. These controls include the need for Conservation Area consent for the demolition of any unlisted buildings, the need for planning consent for roof extensions, most forms of external cladding, and the installation of satellite dishes visible from the street, significantly reduced “permitted development rights” for alterations and extensions to dwelling houses, and 6 weeks written notice of works to trees not already protected by Tree Preservation Orders. In September 2004 an Article 4(2) Direction was made on the area which removed certain additional “permitted development rights”, and as a result planning permission is required for

nearly all external works which affect the appearance of properties in the area. These restrictions are outlined in more detail in the Article 4(2) Direction itself, copies of which were sent to every household in the area when it was first made. Further copies are available from the Council on request.

Action: The Council will ensure that new development within the Conservation Area preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area in accordance with policy BHE 13 of the adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006 and other published guidance.

(iii) Erosion of character and additional planning control

The Conservation Area Appraisal identified the following as works which pose a threat to, or detract from, the special character of the Conservation Area:

- Replacement of original windows and doors with inappropriate modern alternatives.
- Replacement of original natural slate roofs with concrete tiles or artificial slates.
- The painting, or rendering of the original facing brickwork.
- The installation of satellite dishes on the street elevation.
- The loss of front garden privet hedges, notably with replacement decorative walls.
- The paving over of front gardens.

Regrettably there are numerous examples of unsympathetic alterations having been carried out in the past, which both individually and cumulatively detract from the special character or appearance of the area. If left unchecked such works will gradually erode the special qualities that justified the original designation. The Council will therefore take appropriate enforcement action, where it is expedient, to remove unauthorised works.

On a positive note, the Council is currently producing a Conservation Area Guidance leaflet for residents within the Thornhill Road area, and subject to resources, provides financial assistance towards the cost of repair or restoration of original features by means of Historic Buildings Grants.

Action: The Council will ensure that unauthorised development is subject to effective enforcement action wherever practicable, to protect the special character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

(iv) Trees

If not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order, anyone intending to lop or fell a tree within the Conservation Area greater than 100mm in diameter at 1.5 metres above ground level, is required to give the Council 6 weeks written notice before starting work. This provides the Council with an opportunity of assessing the tree in question to see if it makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, in which case a Tree Preservation Order may be served. Free professional advice on all tree issues, whether the pruning of existing trees or advice on suitable species for planting, is always available from Council Tree Officers.

Action: The Council will consider the use of Tree Preservation Orders wherever appropriate where a tree of high amenity value is considered to be under threat. These will include trees within and outside the area where they contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area or views identified in the Appraisal. The Council will maintain and replace as necessary the street trees in the Conservation Area, and continue to provide free professional advice on all tree matters as required.

(v) Setting and views

The urban context of the Conservation Area, its “setting”, is very important, and development which would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area or its setting, or which would impact detrimentally on views into and out of the area will be resisted. The important views are identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal, and the Council will seek to ensure that all new development respects these views.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that all development respects the setting of the Conservation Area and important views within, into, and out of the area identified in the Appraisal. These will be protected from inappropriate forms of development.

(vi) The public realm and enhancement

The Appraisal has identified only small elements of surviving original floorscape within the Conservation Area in the form of granite kerbs; the roadway and footpath generally having been resurfaced over the years using tarmac. Within the footpaths the ornamental street trees have been identified as important components contributing to the overall character of the area. Street lighting is however provided by modern steel lamp columns of a standard design found throughout the Borough. The overall impression is of a streetscape largely typical of any other street in the area, with no special consideration having been made to the general duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

The reinstatement of traditional paving flags in Thornhill Road and the introduction of Victorian-style streetlighting would enhance the character and appearance of the area and reinforce its special identity. An audit of the public realm should be undertaken to identify any redundant features, opportunities for enhancement etc, subject to resources.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that any surviving historic streetscape features are retained, and that any future highway works will bring a positive improvement to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in accordance with the spirit of the English Heritage “Streets for all” campaign

(vii) Monitoring and review

The following actions need to be taken to ensure that this appraisal and management plan are accepted and acted upon:

- **Public Consultation:** The appraisal and management plan will be subject to a period of public consultation and views expressed as part of that process will be considered when preparing the final draft for Council adoption.
Consultation will include placing the documents on the Council website, in libraries and council offices, consultation with local amenity groups and residents associations where they exist, and providing hard copies on request. A letter advising of these arrangements will be delivered to all properties in the area by mail shot.
- **Boundary review:** The Council will maintain the current boundary of the Conservation Area and continue to review it over time in accordance with Best Practice and guidance on the management of the historic environment produced by English Heritage.
- **Document review:** This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:
 - (i) A survey of the Conservation Area and its boundaries
 - (ii) An updated “heritage count” comprising a comprehensive photographic record.
 - (iii) An assessment of whether the management proposals detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements.
 - (iv) The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and proposed actions and amendments.
 - (v) Public consultation on the review findings, any proposed changes, and input into the final review.

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